

The Paper

from the producers of the *IndyBulletin*
Independent Fortnightly News and Opinion

Released: Friday 26th January 2001, Edition #4

Free

Business, Politics, Conservation

A familiar debate revisited

BEN PRACCUS

Like the unending swales of blue upon its lengthy, shifting shores, the fight for Stockton Bight has rolled on for over 30 years. The massive sand dunes have been the source of more conflict than almost any other tract of land on the continent. Except for the whole country that is, but that is a different question, perhaps involving a different understanding of the word ownership.

At the beginning of September this year, Port Stephens council approved Mineral Deposits (MDO)'s application for a 15 year and 955ha extension upon its existing lease to mine the Stockton Sand Dunes, located just outside of Newcastle, NSW. This extension effectively grants mining rights to over half of Premier Carr's promised National Park.

In contrast to Council's approval of the mining extension, Port Stephens tourist information states that Stockton Bight is a place worth protecting for future generations. In light of the 150 submissions council received toward Mineral Deposits' application, 140 of which opposed further mining extensions, the evidence points toward public opinion weighing in favour of conservation.

MDO's application is now in the hands of the State Government, who in reality have the final power to grant or reject the lease. As of December 2000 this final decision is yet to be made.

The legacy of land management within the Bight stretches back far beyond European settlement to that of the Worimi and Maaingal aborigines. At present both the Maaingal and Worimi have Native title claims lodged on Stockton Bight, a factor that is no doubt slowing the State Government's decision concerning

MDO's lease extension.

The issues surrounding Aboriginal land and Native title add yet another layer of complexity to the onion skin of pragmatic land management in the Bight. Peeling away the skin reveals conflict within the wider aboriginal community itself; the Worimi Land Council having indicated possible support for the mine and a rejection of the Maaingal Native title claims. An agreement with Mineral Deposits would invariably result in royalties being returned to the Worimi Land Council.

According to MDO's website, they have indeed been consulting with the Worimi Land Council, though there is no mention made of the Maaingal.

With regard to Native title claims, consider the fact that we are in the midst of both a culturally and politically sensitive process which is yet to be resolved. Taking this in mind, the most responsible approach for any governing body to take is to prolong making a decision until all claims have been finalised. Moreover, the words 'cultural significance' require a different brand of science that is as qualitative as it is quantitative.

Some may argue that these are the voices of extreme minority groups, unrepresentative of the public consciousness, ever wishing to forestall a nation's development and progress. However, the fruits and pitfalls of conservation history shows us that a failure to check and balance development most often results in an undue bias toward development itself.

In terms of environmental law and development, the main binding legal document in NSW is the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (EP&A Act) of 1979, which 20 years down the track is in reality much more of a facilitator of development than a protector



Mick Lumsdon reports from Goongerah. Story on Page 4.

of the environment, due to the amendments it has received. Remember, this is the primary piece of legislation that guides the approval process of the Stockton Bight mine extension.

As another analogy to the historical bias noted above, consider the building of a road through an area of potentially high conservation value. Once this road is put through, the conservation value of the area decreases considerably, making calls for protection of the area much easier to defeat.

The above scenario, whilst theoretical, is not uncommon. The lineage of mindset it imbues can be drawn back to the beginnings of the Industrial revolution and that enduring quality of pushing ahead, worrying about our mistakes after the fact. As humans, evolution has impaled us with the ability to think with foresight before we rush and leap into action, perhaps it is time that we rose to its potential.

The Almighty Dollar - 'financial justification for all'

So, what about those 50 extra jobs and the \$20 million financial injection (over the course of the mine's life), highlighted as benefits for the local community (M.D.O.,2000)? And how do we place the more than \$100 million (Crystal, 2000) Port Stephens gains from tourism annually within this equation?

To understand the deeper ramifications of immediate and long-term financial viability, it is worth considering the tertiary financial effects of mining on the Port Stephens area. In regions where there is a public image of natural beauty driving tourism inflow, mining extensions and tourism are obviously incompatible fiscal partners. Expansion of the Stockton mine will inevitably detract from the image of natural beauty and will, particularly in the long term, be potentially damaging to ongoing tourism. So which of these industries

are more important to the region?

Earlier this year, Port Stephens mayor Steve Busteed had, it seemed, formulated an answer to this question. He is quoted to have said that 'environmental and tourism concerns outweighed the commercial benefits of mining the northern dune on Oyster Cove Rd' (Crystal, 2000), when considering glassmaker ACI's sand mining application at Tanilba Bay. The mayor was also heard to say:

'A sand mine would be bad for our image, the roads we maintain and our environment.' Perhaps the Mayor would care to detail why this statement is not also relevant to Stockton Bight?

A few attributed words do exist as a possible answer. As the Newcastle Herald reports: "Cr Busteed said ACI's plans were far more invasive than the proposal put forward by MDO" (Newcastle Herald, 2000). Most locals would not agree.

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News from around the World

New World Social Forum

The World Social Forum will be a new international arena for the creation and exchange of social and economic projects that promote human rights, social justice and sustainable development. It will take place every year in the city of Porto Alegre, Brazil, during the same period as the World Economic Forum, which happens in Davos, Switzerland, at the end of January.

<http://www.worldsocialforum.org/>

Tibetan Rights Groups Increase Pressure on Energy Giant

Jan 21 (IPS) - Rights groups, concerned that China's state energy company's oil and gas exploitation on the Tibetan plateau will harm Tibetans, are increasing their efforts to pressure BP Amoco to sell its stake in the company. Since the British energy giant bought 578 million dollars of the company's stock last year, it has been the target of a protest campaign by Tibetan rights groups that argue the investment helps consolidate the Chinese control and occupation of Tibet. The Free Tibet

Campaign, the International Campaign for Tibet, and other Tibet advocacy organisations are now planning to file a shareholder resolution this month that would require BP Amoco to drop its investment in PetroChina.

Jailed before reaching Bhopal

Jan 17 - Nearly 150 people from people's organisations in Madhya Pradesh were jailed while marching on the streets of Bhopal just before noon today. The representatives of people's organisations, including tribals and peasants, were arrested and picked up

from a march while opposing the anti-people policies of the World Bank and Asia Development Bank. The people's organisations were opposing the anti-people policies of the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank. Many organisations expressed their deep apprehensions about the impact of funding from the multilateral institutions and the repressive regime that the Madhya Pradesh government will wreak on the people of the state in order to defend and protect corporate interests.

Turkish Court Bans Cyanide Gold Process Near Ancient Town

Jan 16 (ENS) - Despite an order from the country's Supreme Court backing up environmentalists, the pressure is mounting this week for the reopening of a controversial mine at Ovacik in Turkey's Aegean region. The mine is to use the controversial cyanide leaching method to extract gold, despite local and national protests that the process is too dangerous in area threatened by earthquakes.

Bush Term Opens With Pomp and Protest

HEATHER HADDON AND
MIKE BURKE

Sourced from www.dc.indymedia.org
5:03pm, Saturday January 20th, 2001

The inauguration of George W. Bush on January 20th came during a resurgence of political activism in America and throughout the world which is bringing more and more groups together in the struggle for democratic and progressive change. Bush's rapid effort to assemble one of the most pro-corporate cabinets in history has led to increased opposition by labor environmental groups, students and social justice organisations. Moreover, mounting evidence that Bush stole the presidential election by denying African-Americans their right to vote has created public outrage and is leading to a grassroots revival of the civil rights movement.

WASHINGTON DC Thousands of demonstrators descended on Washington streets today to protest George W. Bush's inauguration and question the legitimacy of his election.

Up to 20,000 or 30,000 protesters were expected at the various rallies sponsored by the International Action Center, National Organization of Women, the Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Center and dozens of smaller organizations.

Thousands of protesters also gathered throughout the country including in Seattle, San Francisco and Los

Angeles to show solidarity against Bush's coronation.

"It is a great American ceremony that doesn't mean much about who has power in this country," said Ralph Nader, leader of the Green Party in an interview with the Independent Media Center today. "It is the soothing transition between two administrations both of which take their orders from big business, the same big businesses that pumped \$35 million of their monies into this weekend's ceremonies."

Even Bush acknowledged - perhaps not consciously - the disunion in America following the election.

"While many of our citizens prosper, others doubt the promise, even the justice, of our own country," said Bush during his Inauguration speech. "The ambitions of some Americans are limited by failing schools and hidden prejudice, and the circumstances of their birth."

But Bush never connected the injustice in America to his own election, which came about through the disenfranchisement of thousands of black and minority voters in Florida and elsewhere.

"He stole the vote," said Ethyl Tobch, 79, of New York City. Tobch traveled to D.C. as part of a mass contingent of demonstrators organized by the National Organization of Women (NOW). "The fact that the people's votes were absolutely stolen, plus today's 'checkpoints', is very



Protestors question Bush and his administration

source: www.dc.indymedia.org

frightening. It makes you feel like you are in a real dictatorship."

For the first time in history, Washington police set up checkpoints that everyone had to pass through in order to get near the parade route. Protest organizers from the International Action Center had challenged the constitutionality of the checkpoints, but a court ruled on Friday that police would be allowed to stop and check anyone at the ten sites.

While 7,000 police and law enforce-

ment officers were on duty today, there were far fewer reports of protester-police violent encounters or arrests compared to recent demonstrations in Seattle, Washington, Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

Of the bag searches at the checkpoints, Molly Norton of New York commented that "People have to come up with creative solutions to this type of denial of the right of assembly and the freedom to express yourself."

Despite the checkpoints, protesters

were able to line Pennsylvania Avenue with signs reading such things as "Hail to the Thief" and "Revote. Revolt."

Numerous protesters proudly highlighted the array of voices opposed to Bush and his Administration. Members from NOW marched alongside the Black Bloc, backers of Leonard Peltier chanted in unison with Black Panthers, Puerto Rican nationalists demanding a free Vieques danced in the street near dozen of activists calling for Mumia Abu-Jamal's freedom.

Independent Media - Gaining Credibility

JOHN TARLETON

reports on a recent conference held by the fast-growing independent media network in the U.S.A.

Close to 200 journalists gathered at the Independent Media Convergence on the weekend of October 13-14 2000 on the Trinity College campus in downtown Burlington, Vermont. Most of the journalists came from the creative fringe of the media universe - community radio, public access cable TV, alternative newspapers/magazines and activist web sites. They listened to speeches from Amy Goodman, Michael Parenti and Njoki Njehu. They huddled in workshops and discussion groups to share experiences, to strategize and to try and take steps toward building a sustainable movement for media democracy in a society heavily influenced by a handful of enormous media conglomerates.

"This a part of a historic battle that is already well underway," said Greg Guma of Toward Freedom, one of the event's co-sponsors. "We have to change relationships between individuals and the existing media."

The Convergence buzzed with ideas and optimism. The independent media has been a part of American life dating at least as far back as 1735 when John Peter Zenger was hauled into a New York court for insulting an official of the Crown. More recently, it has taken to the Internet with gusto, making the most of the Net's global reach and low publishing costs.

One of the most intriguing developments in the past year has been the development of the Independent Media Center (IMC), which first emerged last November in Seattle to cover massive anti-World Trade Organisation protests. The IMC

website, which received 1.5 million 'hits' during its coverage of the week-long "Battle of Seattle", uses open source software and allows grassroots print, photo, audio and video journalists from around the world to personally upload their own work. The IMC has grown exponentially since Seattle. There are now 37 IMCs scattered in cities across the US and Canada and in countries around the world including Mexico, France, Italy, Israel and Australia. Globalising from below, the IMC may have more "bureaus" than CNN or the New York Times by the end of 2001.

A contingent of about 40 IMC members from up and down the East Coast as well as Seattle and Vancouver attended the Convergence. After all the speeches and workshops were done, they decided to keep on going. Crowding into a small room across from the campus's main auditorium, they drew

up an agenda, selected co-facilitators, broke into working groups, did "report backs" and inched forward in defining the values, mission and working structure of a decentralized global Internet news service. There was a hunger for a kind of meaningful, shared participation that has been a defining characteristic of the protest movement against corporate globalisation.

How to increase intra-IMC co-ordination without curtailing the autonomy of local IMCs? Would a spokescouncil model work? If so, what would it look like? How can the IMC obtain more funding and resources without becoming a professionalised bureaucracy? How can the IMC reach out beyond its white counter-cultural base? Should IMC try to upgrade its journalistic standards? Or, would that exclude too many people without formal journalistic training? How can the IMC keep

itself as open as possible without allowing itself to be subverted by hostile groups that don't share its values? Is the IMC's orientation "anti-corporate" or "anti-capitalist"?

The questions came easier than the answers. Any decisions that could be reached would serve as recommendations to be passed along to various list serves for further discussion. 11 months into the IMC project, there was a sense of approaching new and previously uncharted frontiers of personal and collective self-expression.

Indymedia is also alive and well in Australia, with both Melbourne and Sydney providing localised websites. To upload your own work, go to www.melbourne.indymedia.org, or www.sydney.indymedia.org. This article is an excerpt from John's own website, found at: www.cybertraveler.org

... continued from page 1

Again considering long-term implications, increased employment dollars gained from extensions to sand mining have a very limited life span, whilst a National Park will create stable and sustainable employment as well as long-term tourism dollars. Such tourism dollars come both in revenue from visitors to the National

Park and from drawing more people to the Port Stephens and Hunter regions. Ecotours of Stockton Bight are currently being piloted by Newcastle's Wilderness Society.

The envisioning of generations is particularly important as it helps us to consider and understand the implications of land management above and beyond the immediate sit-

uation.

It is true; products such as glass, paint, plastics, ceramics and medical technologies require, at the present time, minerals extracted through sand mining. The case being put forward is not that 'all sand-mining should suddenly cease'. What we are wishing to consider is the context of a particular situation and the suitability of extending mining within a

fragile ecosystem of high conservation value. With the footprint of human industry and urbanisation already deeply stamped upon the globe, the argument here is that cordoning off certain areas as no go zones for further industrial and urban development is a must.

For more information:
Newcastle Wilderness Society -
(02) 4929 4395
Mineral Policy Institute - www.mpi.org.au

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Welcome to Edition Four

of The Paper, an independent fortnightly newspaper dedicated to topical issues and current happenings.

Over the past few years, we have seen a huge growth in Independent Media - community-level reporting on issues that are not deemed big enough for coverage by the mainstream. In my opinion, this grassroots movement has come about for two major reasons: mainstream media's increasing prioritisation of corporate agendas; and the ensuing disillusionment of community groups who feel under-represented and out of touch with the priorities of their news source.

Recently when browsing through independent journalist John Tarleton's website 'Cybertraveler', I was amazed to find someone sum up my thoughts on this matter so succinctly:

"One of the ironies of picking up the daily paper is that it always has a Business section but it never has a labor section that talks about those issues or provides a kind of quality journalism describing the lives and aspirations and difficulties of people who go to work every day."

John spends his time traveling the globe and providing direct reports and commentary on the issues, events and people that he comes in contact with. Investigative journalism in the truest sense of the word. An extract from John's site, detailing how the birth of the Independent Media Centre has spurred the growth of Independent Media, can be found on page 2.

We hope The Paper is fulfilling people's expectations as a reliably independent source of news. Contributions and feedback are always welcome - contact details can be found on page 2.

Enjoy Edition Four, and thanks for your ongoing support!

Marni Cordell

Melbourne to host: World Trade Organisation Federal Senate Public Inquiry in April

ALAN GRIFFITHS

From the 26th to 27th of April, at a Melbourne location to be confirmed, Australia's federal senate inquiry, the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties, will be conducting a two-day public hearing into Australia's relationship with the World Trade Organisation.

This inquiry is significant for it is the same body that conducted a similar 1998 inquiry into our relationship with the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). Labeled 'a Bill of

Rights for transnational corporations', the secret MAI negotiations collapsed after this public inquiry established what it meant for Australia. Now this inquiry is finding out about similar WTO agreements that further threaten indigenous, workers, women's, environment and democratic rights. Even though the cutoff date for public submissions expired last year, submissions are still accepted.

Although S11 put Australia on the map as a progressive movement against global capital, some analysts

believe that opportunities like A26 could cause deeper fissures in Australia's major political parties that are still blindly pursuing free trade. Juxtaposed against hollow accusations that the protestors 'don't understand the issues', Australia is likely to see some in-depth analyses and rigorous debate presented at this inquiry.

A26 will be a golden opportunity to highlight a whole gamut of issues relating to the rationalist free trade agenda, and Melbourne could very well see a repeat of the colourful

protests that marked s11. Mindful of last year's success, protestors will be keen to further stress the alternatives to free trade. Groups are only now beginning to plan for a mass convergence outside these hearings.

*If you wish to find out more and/or write a submission to this inquiry, email Alan Griffiths at: composer@alphalink.com.au
Or visit:
<http://www.apb.gov.au/house/committee/jsc/wto/proram.htm>
<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~gcforum/VicWTOWatch.htm>*

Australia Day - Respecting Our History

JASON GIBSON

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture has shown tremendous vitality and strength amidst the process of British colonisation, yet non-Indigenous Australians rarely take the opportunity to explore this history. Australia Day, otherwise known as Invasion Day, on the 26th of January offers the perfect opportunity for us to explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship and acknowledge the 500 or so different Aboriginal nations that existed here up until white occupation. There are many ways to do this - below are just a few.

Coranderrk Cemetery:

Coranderrk Cemetery is perhaps one of the most important testimonials of Melbourne's colonial history. The Coranderrk Aboriginal Station began in 1863 after a parliamentary inquiry recommended that a sizeable tract of land be given back to those of the

Kulin Nation clans that surrounded Melbourne. It was anticipated that the station would be self-determining and eventually a self-sufficient haven for the local Aboriginal population. By 1867 the community had their own bakery, sawmill, school etc. The Board of Protection of Aborigines saw the people's determination to manage their affairs themselves as a challenge to their authority and by the 1880s the intentions of the inquiry were forgotten and the station was formally closed in 1924.

The Coranderrk Cemetery near Healesville was handed over to descendants of the Wurundjeri, the traditional custodians of the land in 1991. The most remarkable grave is that of William Barak. Barak was as a young boy present at the signing of John Batman's 'treaty' with Billibellary for the acquisition of Kulin Lands in 1835. Recognised as a man of dignity, artistic ability and wisdom by both the Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal people alike, Barak died in 1903. Barak's gravestone was vandalised in the 1940s and taken to the Shire Depot, until being rediscovered in 1955. The gravestone was re-erected and now stands in an overgrown Coranderrk Cemetery. The cemetery is at Melways ref: 277 K9

Koori Heritage Trust:

Established in 1985, the Koori Heritage Trust hosts exhibitions, education programs, a retail shop and a reference library. The galleries feature artefacts from pre-colonial times as well as contemporary Koori art and craft. The retail shop has a number of books documenting the history of Kooris in Victoria and New South Wales as well as Aboriginal experiences in other parts of the country. The Koori Heritage Trust can be found at 234-236 Flinders Lane, Melbourne. Entrance to the galleries is by donation.

Justice & Peace Candlelight walk:

In Adelaide Australians can show their support for a treaty with Indigenous people. Candles will be lit for justice and peace advocating an Indigenous treaty on Friday January 26, and every following first Friday of the month throughout 2001. Walkers can gather with candles at Government House from 7pm for an 8.30pm start after cultural events. The walk aims to protect Ngarindjeri culture, spiritual beliefs, lands and waters, and to stop any nuclear waste dump on traditional lands in the Northern part of the State. For further information contact the organisers: kalparrin@lm.net.au

There are many other cultural tours and cultural centres worth visiting - contact the Office of National Tourism and Koori Heritage Trust for more information.

Reclaiming Cockatoo Island

SAM DE SILVA

On November 20th last year, Isabell Coe was amongst a small group of people who rowed a boat across Sydney Harbor to Cockatoo Island to reclaim it under Aboriginal sovereignty. The group has established an Aboriginal Tent Embassy there, and is preparing to counter-claim the Commonwealth's claim of ownership over the island.

"We have claimed Cockatoo Island under Aboriginal Sovereignty, which means that we have never signed any treaties, we never relinquished sovereignty to our country", said Ms Coe who is one of the spokespeople for the group occupying the Island.

The white history of the island is not a happy one. It used to be a penal colony, followed by an institution for State girls. In the 1900s it became a shipbuilding yard and industrial site, a legacy that has left the soil and ground water tainted with chemicals and heavy metals.

"There was a lot of pain and suffering that had gone on here", says Ms Coe.

The members of the Tent Embassy claim that the Island needs to be healed. "We have come to test the reconciliation process. We are here with the oldest ceremony in the world and we are trying to re-link it back through the country and heal our country and the people."

There has already been a court hearing concerning the occupation of Cockatoo Island. On December 29th, Justice Lewry of the Supreme Court of NSW rejected the Commonwealth's argument for the eviction of the members from the Island. Another court hearing will occur on February 5th, when occupiers plan to ask the Commonwealth for proof of ownership of the land.

"The mere fact religious and cultural issues have not been given legal representation does not mean that they should not be given consideration," Justice Lewry is reported as saying by Sydney Indymedia. "I consider that the law in this area should not be so inflexible so as not to deny them this right".

Sovereignty is at the heart of the case

for Cockatoo Island. For Isabell Coe and the other members of the Tent Embassy, it comes down to the simple fact that "the people who came here on a boat need a treaty to be here".

"Just because they planted a flag in part of Australia doesn't mean they own it. This country was never Terra Nullius - every inch was spoken for", says Ms Coe.

But she doesn't have confidence that the Australian courts will deliver justice. She has already experienced the High Court failed to acknowledge that genocide had been committed against the Aboriginal peoples.

By establishing a permanent Tent Embassy at Cockatoo Island, like the one in Canberra, Isabell Coe hopes to bring further attention to the fact that Aboriginal people are effectively being killed off by government policy. "It is not about reconciliation - it is about ending the genocidal war...they might not be shooting us outright every day. But they are killing us. The way they do it is through their legislature, through their rules", she says.

The Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra was established in 1972 and is still there today despite numerous attempts to break it up by the Government. Ms Coe refers to Cockatoo Island as a "consulate" of the Canberra Embassy which represents all the Aboriginal Nations of Australia. She says that one of the reasons the Embassy was set up was because "we have been treated as aliens in our own country".

The status of Cockatoo Island will



Cockatoo Island in Sydney Harbour

East Gippsland - in harmony and conflict

MICK LUMSDON

Gathering at Goongerah - Forest Actions near Errinundra NP - Loggers Face Riot Charges in Bairnsdale Court

The Welcoming Committee

Orbost was behind me, and I was travelling up the winding Bonang Highway towards Goongerah for the Gathering. Coming around a corner I saw a log lying across half the road, three police standing behind it. They signaled me to stop.

"Where ya headed?" one asked, knowing the answer already. They weren't smiling.

"Little bit of a festival happening at Goongerah. Thought I'd go and check it out".

"Got a licence there mate?"

They weren't really being hostile, but their attitude left you in little doubt where the local police force stood on the issue.

It had been at least five years since I had been to Goongerah, and my last visit had proved to be an epiphany for me, in how I perceived the practical orient of activism and environmentalism. It has amazed me since how a small town in isolated East Gippsland could continue to play such a significant role in empowering and educating activists around the country.

Goongerah Gathering, 12-15 Jan

Plenty of people came to the Gathering; despite the heat and the 5 ½ hour drive from Melbourne or Sydney, the festival was well attended by a diverse but cohesive group.

There were workshops and meetings concerning events past and future; there was live music and techno; there were chi tents and smoothie stalls, and the kitchen was firing up.

In many ways the festival was reflective of where we're at; a beautiful setting, but over-cleared and over-grazed; there was a fast flowing creek and an idyllic waterhole; but blackberry brambles overran the riverbanks. It was wonderful to experience what freedoms and beauty we still have; with attentiveness it could become paradise; but if we are complacent it could disappear altogether.

Despite internal debates and external pressures, the spirit in Goongerah is strong. Although there are uncertainties concerning the future of the township, the community functions and extends well beyond the Goongerah Environment Centre (GECO) office.

Action at Survey Road

From the festival, there was enough energy and people to consider a practical operation against Old Growth Logging in the area. The site

chosen for the action was a road building operation on Survey Road, near the edge of Errinundra National Park, and was a very logical choice for a number of reasons:

- The road was being upgraded to give it capacity to handle logging trucks;
- Logging of old growth was about to commence using this road, once the road work was complete
- The area to be logged is rainforest, and is the habitat of endangered species
- A Tiger Quoll scat had been found in the area, indicating that it certainly comprises part of the habitat of one of these very rare and highly endangered marsupials
- In 1992 a Victorian Government scientific panel concluded that the Tiger Quoll is "in a demonstrable state of decline which is likely to result in extinction"
- The DNRE definition of 'rainforest' remains ambiguous; but they are prepared to allow logging in areas that might be rainforest by their own definition
- The area has not been surveyed by scientists prior to allowing logging
- DNRE gave permission to clearfell the area based on no more than satellite imaging
- The area to be logged is close to the Errinundra National Park, and from an ecological point of view, should be a part of it
- The roadwork was being performed by contractors employed by the DNRE, (ie at a cost to the public purse,) when the only clear benefi-

aries of the road improvement are loggers. This same money equally could be invested into roads of public utility, tourism, or sustainable industries, instead of subsidising a horrendously destructive industry.

Despite a number of arrests, the action proceeded smoothly. Only when the police resorted to tactics such as hair-pulling to remove protesters from the excavator did the situation become heated; but ultimately an amicable agreement was reached with the contractors, and negotiations with the DNRE are continuing. More detailed descriptions of the action have been placed on the Melbourne Indymedia website.

Court Case in Bainsdale

Meanwhile in Bainsdale, the police are presenting a case against a group of 23 loggers charged over an attack of the camp at Goolengook on the evening of February 21st last year, where a number of victims suffered blows from iron bars and other weapons. For a fuller account of this incident, see: <http://www.geco.org.au/attack.html>

The case is at the committal proceeding stage; the prosecution puts their evidence to the magistrate, who will decide if there is sufficient evidence for the matter to go to trial. The committal proceeding began on Monday January 15th, and concluded on Tuesday January 23rd; a decision on whether the matter will go to trial

is expected in the next two weeks.

The defence is funded and prepared from Legal Aid; it would appear that the defence is being bankrolled by the logging industry, presumably for PR reasons. Due to the large number of defendants, the bar table is crowded with seven defence counsel, each of whom has an opportunity to question the prosecution witnesses.

Much of the evidence in this case comes from witnesses who were victims of the attack. During the proceeding, the defence lawyers attempt to discredit the witnesses by inquiring into their past protest activities, and requesting that they name everyone who attended actions prior to the attack. After momentary confusion, the magistrate decided to allow the question be put to the witnesses. The witnesses appeared to cope well with the gruelling and frequently distasteful questioning by certain defence counsel. The defence is playing a hardball game, but this would appear to be borne as much of desperation as from any real conviction.

The Ongoing Situation

Forest blockades are continuing at both Survey Road and at Goolengook. People are always needed, especially at Goolengook right now. For further information, please contact GECO on 5154 0156.

Department Fails to Prosecute Breaches

FAITH THOMAS

When the NSW Legislative Assembly brought in the Native Vegetation Conservation Act on the 1st January 1998, it was assumed that the destruction of native ecosystems would finally be taken seriously. At last there would be some regulation of private land clearing which had previously gone largely unchecked. But the Act has been a disappointment. Not because it fails to include appropriate penalties or because it is full of loop holes, but because the Department of Land and Water Conservation has not prosecuted any of the 360 breaches of the Act that have occurred in the past three years and has actually approved the clearing of over 2,000 square kilometres of woodland.

The situation is so ludicrous that even mainstream media has picked up on it. Radio National's Background Briefing ran a story in April last year focusing on the illegal clearing of two large areas of privately owned bushland. One, an area of 600 hectares of Coolibah woodland, is habitat to the endangered Regents Honey Eater. The culprits were the owner of Australia's largest Holden Dealer Suttons and the biggest wheat grower in NSW. No penalties were imposed, despite the fact that the act stipulates fines of between 10,000 and 100,000 dollars.

The landowners were merely told to restore the land and fence the cleared areas.

So why have these breaches, along with the other 358 that Minister for Land and Water Conservation Mr Richard Amery has admitted have occurred in the last three years, gone unpunished? One reason is inherent in the Act itself, which states that prosecution of any breaches of the Act must commence within two years. However, this alone cannot account for the kind of blatant 'nose thumbing' that has been tolerated. If the department were serious about preventing illegal land-clearing, it would have at least made an example of the most severe cases.

A more sinister explanation lies in the fact that Mr Amery is also the Minister for Agriculture. Under ideal circumstances, if the government were seriously promoting and facilitating the cross over to sustainable agriculture, this would make sense. However it is clear that in this instance it represents a conflict of interest that is being ignored by the Premier and is largely unrecognised by the NSW public.

The destruction has not been restricted to illegal clearing. According to an article published in the Sydney Morning Herald in August last year, 'a secret State

Government ministerial briefing paper' obtained by members of the Nature Conservation Council and whose contents have been confirmed as truth by Mr Amery's department, has revealed that 'more than 2,000 square kilometres of woodland in NSW has been approved for clearing since the enactment of the Native Vegetation Conservation Act in 1998.' (James Woodford, SMH, 3rd Aug 2000)



Richard Amery MP

What is more worrying however is that the real rate of land-clearing is far greater when 'exempt clearing' is taken into account. The Act specifies that each landholder may clear up to two hectares of land per annum, which according to Nature Conservation Council executive officer Kathy Ridge, would put the total of approved land-clearing in the period between January 1998 and August 2000 closer to 4,000 square

kilometres, double the figure stated in the Department's ministerial briefing. She said this would make NSW land-clearing comparable to that in Queensland, where clearing has accelerated as the Government prepares to adopt stricter rulings.

The NSW Government's own vegetation advisory council has warned the DLWC that they must rein in clearing or risk breaching agreements with the Commonwealth on both greenhouse gases and biodiversity. If they do not, everyone, whether they live in the city or in a rural area, is going to pay for their foolhardy decisions.

Widespread and increasing soil salinity, erosion of topsoil, reduced farm productivity and a reduction in the quality of drinking water are just some of the consequences we can all look forward to.

References:
www.forests.org
www.midcoast.com.au/~bec (Website of the Bellingen Environment Centre)
www.ncnsw.org.au/veg (Website of the NSW Nature Conservation Council)
www.edo.org.au (Website of the Australian Environmental Defenders Office)
www.smh.com.au (Website of the Sydney Morning Herald)

A Sign Of Our Times?

Bosses of a publishing firm are trying to work out why no one noticed that one of their employees had been sitting dead at his desk for five days before anyone asked if he was feeling okay.

George Turklebaum, 51, who had been employed as a proof-reader at a New York firm for 30 years, had a heart attack in the open-plan office he shared with 23 other workers. He quietly passed away on Monday, but nobody noticed until Saturday morning when an office cleaner asked why he was still working during the weekend.

His boss Elliot Wachiaski said "George was always the first guy in each morning and the last to leave at night, so no one found it unusual that he was in the same position all that time and didn't say anything. He was always absorbed in his work and kept much to himself."

A post mortem examination revealed that he had been dead for five days after suffering a coronary. Ironically, George was proofreading manuscripts of medical textbooks when he died.

Birmingham Mercury, 7th Jan 2001.

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